
First records of Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* for The Gambia and Senegal

Clive R. Barlow

Premières mentions de l'Hypolaïs icterine *Hippolais icterina* pour la Gambie et le Sénégal. Une Hypolaïs icterine *Hippolais icterina* a été observée à Brufut (13°23'N 16°45'W), en Gambie, le 3 décembre 2005, et une autre vers Fatick (14°30'N 16°30'W), au Sénégal, le 20 février 2006. Ceci constituent les premières mentions documentées pour ces deux pays. Les oiseaux ont pu être distingués de l'Hypolaïs polyglotte *H. polyglotta* et l'Hypolaïs pâle *H. pallida* par leur plumage à dominance jaune-vert, leurs longues ailes, la plage pâle sur l'aile fermée, et leurs pattes grises. Un tableau présente l'ensemble des observations publiées de l'Hypolaïs icterine dans l'Ouest africain, à l'ouest du Nigéria.

On 26 October 2005, at 08.00 hrs, E. Groenwoud and three other visiting Dutch birders observed a *Hippolais* warbler foraging silently 2 m above ground in open bushy scrub near a vegetable garden project, adjacent to the 'Brufut Woods Regeneration Project', Western Division, The Gambia (13°23'N 16°45'W). The bird had greenish upperparts, a conspicuously long primary projection, 'as long as the secondaries', and not as short as two thirds of the secondaries', and yellowish-white underparts. The legs were greyish and the bill appeared rather heavy. The bird was observed from a distance of 15 m with high-quality optics.

On 20 February 2006, at 07.20 hrs, K. Roy, a Gambian resident, noticed a *Hippolais* with lead-grey legs and a conspicuous pale wing-panel flitting around a mid-height *Acacia* species on the 'Jeunesse en Mission' compound in the village of Niakhar, near Fatick, Senegal (14°30'N 16°30'W). He observed the bird for *c.*10 minutes at eye level from an adjacent rooftop using high-quality optics at a distance down to 3 m. The warbler was rather large and bulky, quite long-billed with an appearance typical of *Hippolais*, and closely resembled Olivaceous Warbler *H. pallida* in structure. It had a narrow yellow supercilium reaching only just behind the eye, greyish-green upperparts with a distinct pale wing-panel, and yellowish-washed underparts, most pronounced on the throat and the undertail-coverts. The lower mandible was yellowish, the upper mandible darker. The length of the primary projection was not noted. No song or foraging calls were given, an issue which KR correctly noted 'to be a striking

difference from typical Olivaceous Warbler sightings in Senegambia'.

Discussion

Based on the above-mentioned features, both birds were identified as Icterine Warblers *H. icterina*. The grey legs, the prominent primary projection of the Gambian bird and the pale wing-panel of the Senegalese individual eliminate the nearest possible confusion species, Melodious Warbler *H. polyglotta*, which has brown legs, no wing-panel and a primary projection circa half the length of the tertials (Borrow & Demey 2001). The prominent yellow-green plumage of both birds eliminates the grey-brown Olivaceous Warbler, which lacks yellow tones and has a persistent foraging call (Barlow *et al.* 1997). EG is familiar with Icterine and Melodious Warblers in Europe; as the former is a common species in Holland, he spent little time studying the bird once the identification was made. KR is very familiar with Melodious and Olivaceous Warblers in The Gambia and realised he was watching something unusual. Additionally, KR is familiar with Icterine Warbler in Europe.

These two observations constitute the first records for Icterine Warbler in The Gambia and Senegal. The species is not listed in the field guide for the area (Barlow *et al.* 1997) and a record near Toubacouta in Senegal in February 1982 is considered doubtful (Morel & Morel 1990). Generally considered a transequatorial migrant to south-eastern and south-central Africa, Icterine Warbler is a rare passage migrant through West Africa west of Nigeria (Barlow *et al.* 1997), with published records from Mauritania, Mali, Guinea-

Table 1. Published records of Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* from West Africa, west of Nigeria.
Tableau 1. Mentions publiées de l'Hypolaïs icterine *Hippolais icterina* de l'Ouest africain, à l'ouest du Nigéria.

Country	Number of records	Months	Notes	References
Mauritania	several	Aug, Sep	Sight records; near Nouakchott	Gee (1984)
Senegal	1	Feb	Sight record	this note
The Gambia	1	Oct	Sight record	this note
Guinea-Bissau	1	Feb	Sight record; in clean fresh plumage	Catry & Mendes (1998)
Guinea	1	May	Sangarédi	Demey (2006)
Mali	'good numbers'	Aug/Sep–Apr	Regular near Bamako, where frequently trapped and re-trapped, Dec–Jan	Lamarche (1981)
Liberia	several	Nov, Dec, Feb, Mar, Apr	Sight records and mist-netted	Colston & Curry-Lindahl (1986), Gatter (1997)
Côte d'Ivoire	1	Dec	Mist-netted at Lamto	Thiollay (1985)
Ghana	3	Apr, May	Sight record, 6 Apr; trapped, 1 May; Belgium-ringed bird recovered 30 Apr	Grimes (1987)*
Togo	3	Nov, Jan, Mar	Sight records	Browne (1980), Cheke & Walsh (1996)

* Although Grimes (1987) gives Bannerman (1939) as the reference for his statement that 'A skin collected at Aburri (Shelley & Buckley 1872) was subsequently lost from BMNH', Bannerman (1939) actually writes: 'The old record of the Icterine Warbler having been taken at Aburi, Gold Coast, is on the authority of Shelley and Buckley, but there is no such specimen in their collections in the British Museum, and some confusion with the Melodious Warbler is possible.' Grimes's (1987) re-wording is thus incorrect and the record should be rejected.

Bissau, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo (Borrow & Demey 2001, Demey 2006; see Table 1).

With an ever-increasing number of competent observers active in the region, closer scrutiny in the field of yellow-green *Hippolais* warblers, using the key identification criteria of wing-panel presence, primary projection length and leg colour, may result in increased reports of Icterine Warbler. However, recent ringing schemes in Senegal and The Gambia have not found the species.

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First record of Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* for The Gambia

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Première mention du Pouillot à grands sourcils *Phylloscopus inornatus* pour la Gambie. Un Pouillot à grands sourcils *P. inornatus* a été observé et photographié à Kotu (13°28'N 16°43'W) en Gambie, le 3 décembre 2005. Ceci constitue la première mention documentée pour le pays et la deuxième pour l'Afrique sub-Saharienne, la première étant celle d'un individu au nord du Sénégal, le 6 décembre 2003.

On 3 December 2005, between 09.00 and 09.30 hrs, T. Armstrong, N. Marshall, J. Rayner, D. Smith and F. Wake watched a small, boldly marked *Phylloscopus* with two gleaming wingbars busily foraging in a partially leafed and flowering Winter-thorn *Acacia albida* along the Kotu Cycle Track, Kombo St Mary Division, in coastal Gambia (13°28'N 16°43'W). The bird appeared to be picking insects from the blossoms. The only other species present for the duration of the observation was a single Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*. The two birds were watched with high-quality optics from a distance of c.6 m and the *Phylloscopus* was recorded on video. The habitat consists of heavily degraded coastal scrub with scattered deciduous trees and Oil-palms *Elaeis guiniensis* next to an *Avicennia* mangrove-fringed coastal creek. In November–April, birding visitors based at nearby hotels constantly watch the site.

Description

Head dominated by long, bright, creamy-white supercilium, which extended well beyond ear-coverts, kinked as it tapered slightly onto nape, and bordered below by narrow dark eyestripe. Ear-

coverts olivaceous with some indistinct flecking. Crown olive-green without central stripe. Nape and mantle plain olive-green. In the bright light conditions, rear views revealed a warm green cast to mantle and body. Wings darker overall, with two very strong, broad, creamy-white bars on greater and median coverts, tapering slightly towards leading edge of wing. Both wingbars appeared much stronger than normally seen on autumn individuals of Yellow-browed Warbler *P. inornatus* in the UK; this may have been due to the brighter light conditions in The Gambia (T. Armstrong pers. comm.). Flight-feathers dark olive; primaries and secondaries with very narrow pale fringes, tertials with broad pale fringes, though not as bold as on coverts. Underparts dull whitish. Legs and feet orange-brown. Bill dark with a hint of a pale base to lower mandible. Call heard twice, a loud, sharp *tweep* or *tweest* without inflection.

Discussion

Based on the above-mentioned features, the bird was identified as a Yellow-browed Warbler. The generally brighter plumage, leg colour and call eliminated the nearest possible confusion species,